

STATE OF VERMONT AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS	Title: Gender Responsive Policy		Page 1 of
Chapter:	#	Supersedes	
Attachments, Forms & Companion Documents: 1.			
Local Procedure(s) Required: Yes - for establishment of written facility rules only and safekeeping of confidential informant statements and DR recordings. (See Section 11 also.) Applicability: All staff (including contractors and volunteers) Security Level: "B" – Anyone may have access to this document.			

PURPOSE

The Department of Corrections (DOC) will use the research, evidence, and best practices regarding criminal justice-involved women to inform DOC policy, practice, and professional development.

Within the robust evidence of risk, need, and responsivity, the DOC acknowledges the growing evidence regarding women in the criminal justice system. This evidence demonstrates that women's profiles and pathways to crime are different than men's, and that women respond differently to correctional interventions than men.

Research on female offenders has established that women enter the criminal justice system in ways different from those of male offenders. Differences between women and men entering the criminal justice system have been empirically documented with regards to the role of violence, trauma, substance abuse in criminal pathways, offense and re-offense patterns. This includes:

1. The impact of responsibilities for children and other dependent family members, and reduced ability to support self and children
2. Race and ethnicity and the impacts of these in terms of crime, violent partners, and substance abuse
3. Connections with violent and substance-abusing partners

POLICY

It is the policy of the DOC to ensure that all services and strategies provided to women are based on evidence and DOC supervision is provided in a manner that is gender-responsive. Five key findings form the basis for gender-responsiveness within the criminal justice system and within DOC. These findings are¹:

¹ Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders; A Summary of Research, Practice and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders, NIC, 2003.

1. An effective system for female offenders is structured differently than that for male offenders.
2. Gender-responsive policy and practice targets women's pathways to criminality by providing effective interventions that address three central issues: trauma and violence, substance abuse, and economic marginality.
3. Correctional sanctions and interventions consider the lesser degree of harm created by the typical offense pattern of the female offender.
4. Gender-responsive policy and practice considers women's relationships, especially with children, and their roles in the community in delivering both sanctions and interventions.
5. Community services are essential to a gender-responsive correctional system.

The DOC will maintain a Women's Services Advisory Committee, to include DOC staff as well as Agency and Community Stakeholders, and will utilize this Committee to help guide and inform DOC practice.

The Department will also develop a training plan for all staff.

AUTHORITY

28 V.S.A. §§ 101 and 102.

REFERENCES

Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders; A Summary of Research, Practice and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders, NIC, 2003.

A Theoretical Basis for Gender-Responsive Strategies in Criminal Justice, Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2002.

DEFINITIONS

Gender Responsive: The acknowledgement of the realities of women's lives, including the pathways they travel to criminal offending and the relationships that shape their lives. Gender-responsive means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives and addresses the issues of the participants. Gender-responsive approaches are multidimensional and are based on theoretical perspectives that acknowledge women's pathways into the criminal justice system. These approaches address social (e.g., poverty, race, class, and gender inequality) and cultural factors, as well as therapeutic interventions. These interventions address issues such as abuse, violence, family relationships, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders. They provide a strength based approach to treatment and skill building. The emphasis is on self-efficacy².

² Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders; A Summary of Research, Practice and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders, NIC, 2003.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All policies, procedures, case practices, and education related to women offenders will be reviewed and developed in accordance with correctional best practice principles and evidence-based practice for working with women offenders³;

The following themes shall serve as a guide for the DOC:

1. Gender: Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.
2. Environment: Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.
3. Relationships: Develop policies, practices, and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, and the community.
4. Services and Supervision: Address substance abuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services and appropriate supervision.
5. Socioeconomic Status: Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions.
6. Community: Establish a system of comprehensive and collaborative community services.

TRAINING

1. The Director of Family Services shall create and maintain a training to educate DOC staff on the principles and responsibilities of this directive.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Any and all training created as part of this directive shall include a competency assessment to ensure that employees are knowledgeable and competent in the subject of gender responsivity.

³ Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders: A Summary of Research, Practice and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders, NIC, 2003.